

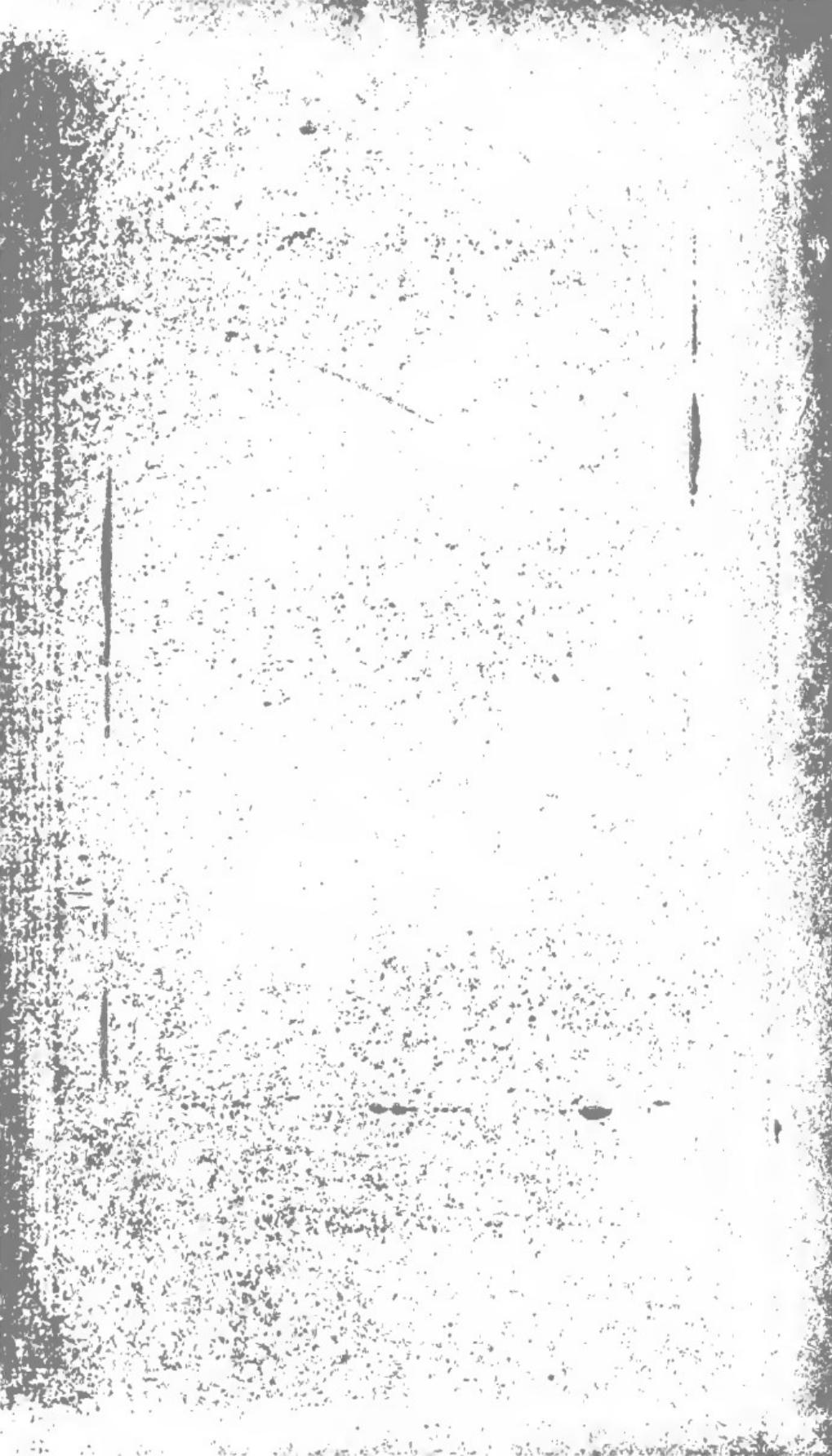
A Homeward Ride



AND OTHER POEMS



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A HOMeward RIDE

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

C. AUSTEN LEIGH.

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A HOMEWARD RIDE.

A LL day I hunted with the Sussex hounds;
Much had I seen, much ridden, much enjoyed
Within the narrow vale that lies between
The Northern woodlands and the Southdown hills.

In February, when the year has turned,
When days grow longer, and the loosened earth
Remembers possibilities of spring,
Then we who hunt are happiest, for then
Do foxes run the straightest, and the ground
Grows sounder for the rider and his horse.

So in the vale, one February day,
I hunted all day long, through pastures now,
And now in ridgy ploughlands intermixed,
And now in echoing coverts, riding fast

To the shrill music of the eager pack.
And, ever and again, we came across,
Deep sunk in miry unsubstantial banks,
The hidden waters of some sluggish brook,
Where many fell, and many more refused.

At length our day was glorious with success,
For the glad pack, running from seen to view,
Seized on their caitiff quarry ; and he died
As gallant foxes die,—not turning short
Unseen within a wood, or bolted forth
By diggers from an unavailing earth,—
But with his head set straight, until the hounds,
Eight miles and more away from where they found,
Closed round him in a many-acred field,
Silent and grim, and fighting to the end.

Thus was my hunting finished, and at length
Southward my horse's head I turned, to ride
Alone beneath the soft grey evening home—
Alone, yet not alone, for he who goes
Companionless has much good company

In the fair thoughts that do environ him.
The past day's feats revolves he ;—how he took
The inner circle, while the racing pack
Turned ever to him, as he eased his horse,
And saw his fellows labouring on the right ;
Or how, while many fell, yet he unscathed
Swung some large fence, and landing in the field
Exultant found that he was well with hounds ;
Or else of other rides in other days,
Glad with the voices of familiar friends,
By Berkshire lanes perchance, or banks of Thames.

I, as I rode, the while before me saw
Mount Caburn, foremost outpost of the chalk,
Rise near and massive in the misty air.
Behind, the rounded outline of the downs,
Blue in the distance, bulwarks of the realm,
Were warding off the distant wintry sea,
In line almost continuous, yet transpierced
By the two streams that ever fall and fill
As falls and fills the tide,—twin tidal streams,

Cuckmere and Ouse, that through alluvial meads
Pass slow and sluggish to a shingly shore.

Surely the land was pleasant where I rode,
Fertile and green, and bounded by the hills,
With much to mark and much to meditate.
Much is there to observe for them who pass
Out of a valley to the upland chalk,
And watch the road, and soil, and herbage change,
And sweet are landscapes bounded by the hills.

Fair are the crofts the Sussex yeoman reaps,
Fair are the timbered granges where he dwells,
And fair the churches scattered in the land,
Built of grey stone or flint, some standing forth
Conspicuous on outliers of the downs,
Some bosomed deep by woodland villages,
Some nestling in the hollows of the hills,
And some in hearing of the windy sea.
Yet this fair land, men say, in Saxon times
Was holden by a salvage heathen race
Fiercest of all the tribes of British earth,

Who last of all in England bowed the knee
Before the holy Cross Augustine preached
Among the neighbour folk of woody Kent.

Sons of such fathers are the stalwart race
Of peasants, open-faced and broad of tongue,
Who till these kindly acres, leading slow
Their teams of long-horned ruddy-coated steers.

Son of such fathers is the shepherd, seen,
Or half-seen, through the misty scuds of rain,
Turning his patient back upon the storm,
And propped against his crook beside his charge.

Sons of such fathers built yon country town,
Old-fashioned, neat, with steep and narrow streets
And crown of ancient castle walls, that lies
Midway, upon the lower ridge of chalk,
Between the valley and the topmost hill.

High on that topmost hill whose sides are scarped
With gleaming chalk-pits, where to-day the mill
Its upward arms in swift rotation flings,
Once, in the ancient days of violence,

Unhappy Henry, and his mightier son
Born to be great King Edward, and to reign
Wisest and strongest of Plantagenets,
(Brave then and wise, but not yet fortunate,)
Fought all day long the rebel peers, and fled.
I dream the clang of arms, the flying host,
The harnessed warriors choked in winding Ouse,
Where now the engines scream along the flats,
And timber bridges thunder with the trains.

Or if my fancy dares a wider flight,
There rises awful on my dreaming mood
The age primeval, when the Earth was formed
To what she is to-day; and as I dream,
Saxon, and Norman, and Plantagenet,
Heathen and Christian, are of yesterday.
What was this scene, when the vast ocean poured
His flood inexorable o'er the vale,
Washing away the table-land of chalk
That joined, so wise men tell, the Southdown range
With Surrey and the distant Northdown hills?

Ages on ages long the waters poured
With operation slow and secular,
From underneath the chalk discovering
The ruins of a world more ancient yet,
And bones of creatures huge and horrible.

How vast the gulf that urged its mighty tides
Far up into the land, and shaped the chalk
It spared to rounded forms and hollow combes !

Who sailed upon those waves ? Did any walk,
Human or else half-human, by the tide ?

Or was there only silence dim and vast,
The world not yet in labour of her sons,
But lying tenantless beneath the moon,
As plains Australian lie in these our days,
Not yet discovered, nor yet good for man ?

On me thus musing many things of old,
By this the night has fallen, as I gain
The sweet short turf that clothes the swelling hills.
Dismounted, by my panting horse I climb
High and yet higher to the rustic seat

That crowns the beacon, and against me feel
The fresh breeze coming from the southern sea.

Hence, when the daylight serves, is prospect fair
And vast to northward, o'er the vale supine,
Up o'er the wooded ranges of the Weald
To Ashdown, once a forest, and the place
Of olden workers of the iron ore,
Sounding with hammers and the din of wheels
Ere yet the home of iron was the North,
But now all silent, desolate, and bare.

To-night such view is blotted from my sight ;
I only see about me as I ride
The circling rounded ridges of the hills
Treeless and smooth as tended garden slopes,
The ghostly sheepfolds tinkling to the night,
And low thick patches of the native gorse,
The home of many foxes ; over all
The glimmering line that marks the Channel sea ;
Or sometimes catch the lighthouse flashing light
To mariners from distant Beachy Head.

Even the lonely barns upon these hills
Are landmarks to the vessels out at sea,
Seen by how many eyes of passing men,
Wistful or glad, who fare along the coast;
Some homeward bound, with cheerful thoughts of
friends ;

Some outward, exiles from the land they love !

But I, uncertain, give my horse his rein,
For hard to eyes unused it is to thread
The inextricable error of the hills,
And choose from all the ridge that leads aright.
He confident, with forward pricking ears,
Trots brisker, knowing near his stable door,
And bears me by a track of many ruts,
But in the darkness easy to be lost,
Till from the down I come on arable ;
And soon below me opens in the night
The narrow Cuckmere valley, with its stream
Embanked and straitened ; on the further side
The sheltered village and the formal wood.

And close beneath me, on the hither slope,
I see and hear the homestead that I seek—
The life, the lights, and voices of the farm,
The pleasant Southdown farm, built long ago,
With massive chimneys, as men built of old,
And a steep roof of elder centuries.

Here all night long, though howl the landward blast,
And all the dwelling rattle with the storm,
Are welcomes warm, and faces dear to me,
And converse happier than the gale is high.

At last I cross the roadway, and at last
My hoofs are ringing on the flinty yard ;
And at the sound the stable opening wide
Pours out its flood of hospitable light
On horse and man, mndstained and travelworn ;
And issuing forth inquisitive, the groom
Asks much of how we ran and how we fared.

So pass I from the darkness to the light,
Half-tired and happy, to my brothers' home.

IN THE SOUND OF MULL.

I

IS it Peace, the silence still
That hangs over rock and hill,

And has hushed the restless trouble of the bay
In a slumber so profound,
That there only comes the sound
Of waterfalls that weep themselves away ?

II

And I wonder as I stand,
For it seems a fairy land,
The heather and the mountains and the shore,
And as if these gleaming seas
Never thrilled before a breeze,
And their calm should be broken nevermore.

III

For the sea-bird sits asleep
On the mirror of the deep,
Floating idle with his image below ;
And many a sunlit sail
To invite the lingering gale
Vainly spreads a deep bosom of snow.

IV

Is it Peace, or but a lull
Treacherously beautiful,
But a truce in the elemental strife ?—
Even now the wind descends,
Even now the copsewood bends,
And the waters are ruffled into life.

V

And to-night the waves shall pour
All their anger on the shore,
And the voices of the storm shall be high,
And the mighty wind shall lift
From its black and gleaming rift
The waterfall in smoke to the sky.

VI

And the heavy mist shall rest
On the mountain's patient breast,
On this graveyard where I sit and muse alone
Planted thick with many a bed
Of the nameless rustic dead,
And guarded by this ancient cross of stone.

VII

It cannot reach them there,
The tempest in the air,
Or the rain, or the thunder of the wave,
For their storms are overpast,
They have gone to rest at last,
And there must be Peace at length in the grave.

VIII

But is it so in truth?
Does no memory of youth,
Of hopes that once smiled and passed away,
Of faces loved in vain,
Of life's long unquiet pain,
Vex the souls that have had their mortal day?

IX

Is it all a voiceless calm,
 Closed eyes and folded palm ?
 Do they never see again the vanished years ?
 Never think the thoughts they thought,
 Fight the battles that they fought,
 And once more weep their long forgotten tears ?

X

Yet if their rest but seems,
 Fair Angel of our dreams,
 Where is the mighty Seer who can tell
 In what Heaven thou dost hide,
 Peace white-winged and quiet-eyed,
 By what silent streams thou lovest to dwell ?

XI

Dost thou only shed thy light
 In the pauses of the fight
 That gallant souls are waging with wrong,—
 Gliding softly by the heart
 That sits lonely and apart,
 Like some snatch of an old melodious song ?

XII.

Showing—not to men at ease
Who are borne down summer seas—
The vision of thy well belovèd form ;
But to them who long and late
Meet the cruel waves of fate,
Setting still a steadfast front to the storm ?

SPRING, 1866.

"Ωρα νέα· χελιδών.

LITTLE wanderer of the year,
 Art thou then already here,
 Clinging to our rainy eaves ?
 Is it time to think of leaves ?
 Bringst thou any word of mouth
 From the sun or from the South ?
 Winter hangs about us still,
 And the snowdrift crowns the hill,
 And the woods are lifeless yet,
 And the vale with floods is wet.
 Wake us not before our time
 With the story of a clime
 Where to-day the sun is high,
 Monarch of a cloudless sky ;—

Mock us not with tales like these
Here amid our northern seas.

Rather tell us of the way
Thou hast come to us to-day ;
From what distant Libyan shore
Seeking islands bleak and frore ?
Borne across what troubled seas
To our dim Hesperides ?

Searching for a home and peace,
Didst thou cross the isles of Greece ?
Do the boys in Athens sing,
' See the swallow ! It is spring ! '
As they sang, while yet their town
Queenlike wore her violet crown ?

Flying further, didst thou hear
Sounds confused of hate and fear,—
See the bayonets flashing bright
In the warm Italian light
Round the city, that has been
Ocean's fairest bride and queen,—

Now another Helen lies
Of a fatal strife the prize ?
Didst thou see the purple shroud
Of the heavy thundercloud,
Darkening to their utmost band
All the plains of Fatherland,—
Charged with many a year of woe *
To the waiting fields below ?
Wise in time ! for thou hast come
Here to a securer home ;
Though these skies are ashen grey,
Cold and wet our April day,
Build thy nest, O swallow, here,
Better frost than sword or spear.
Here is shelter safe and good
For thy callow household brood :
Thou shalt keep thy little state
In this realm inviolate,

* Vates ignare futuri !

Careless of the trellised vine
By the Danube and the Rhine,
And shalt ply thine airy games
O'er mine own beloved Thames !

MAY-DAY.

I

FIRST of Summer, last of Spring,
May, unworthy we to sing
Thy bright skies, thy balmy days,
Thickening shades, and flowery ways.

May—May is come :

May—to gentle minds most dear,

May—the jewel of the year :

May is vocal, be not dumb.

II

Hark, the slow stream on its way
Murmurs softer songs to May :
See, the blossom-whitened bough
Hangs in brightest glory now,
Spring—Spring is crowned,
Crowned, alas ! too soon to die ;
Summer's fiercer heat is nigh,
Spring is lost as soon as found.

III

Yet the time that Spring is here
Sigh no sigh, and weep no tear ;
Fill your little cup of mirth,
Short is pleasure's time on earth.

Toil—toil is long ;
Yet the changeless round of duty
Hath its happiness and beauty,—
Sweeter for the toil the song.

IV

Sing then, sing : the birds above
Join the revels that you love :
Dance, till on the meadow's breast
Wearied you sink down to rest :
 Earth—earth is fair ;
Earth is very fair and bright
Bathed in floods of sunny light,
 Round you sweeps the perfumed air.

V

All is happy : to our earth
Heaven gives a silent mirth ;
She is in her fair array,
Let us too make holiday :—
 All—all rejoice,
Mar not with a moody sadness
Nature's gentle spring of gladness,
 Give her happiness a voice.

A LATE SPRING.

I

IT is weariness, counting the hours
 And the days, as they heavily move,
 While she comes not—the queen of the flowers,
 While she lingers—the goddess we love.

II

Long time for her smile have we waited,
 For the fragrance that breathes from her mouth ;
 Long time has she wandered unsated
 On the shores of the prodigal South.

III

Who will tempt her to come to us, telling
 That the swallows have flown to our eaves,
 That the forest's bare branches are swelling
 For her with a promise of leaves ;—

IV

That the copses for her have been keeping
Long hoarded their primroses pale ;
That the trout in the shallows are leaping,
And the cuckoo is loud in the vale ;—

V

That we wait in these storm-beaten islands
For the glance of her beautiful eyes,
To charm the east wind into silence,
And to light up the clouds of our skies ?

VI

But she hears not, nor comes she ; delaying
Where kingdoms more fortunate shine,
Like Queen Proserpine, carelessly playing
In what gardens of Enna divine.

VII

Can we snatch her perforce ?—to no Hades,
But here, on the fair village greens,
Here to fill up her train of court ladies
With the choice of our chosen May queens.

VIII

Where her footsteps shall fall on the flowers
That a thousand bright children will fling ;
Where the chimes from the grey Gothic towers
Shall speak out their welcome to Spring.

IX

She shall see all the land and its treasure,
And far, from deep woodland or plain,
There shall greet her the lark's song of pleasure
Or the nightingale's musical pain.

X

Ah me ! she is deaf to all voices,
And she comes not to meadow or grove ;
But some happier island rejoices
In the smiles of the goddess we love.

YOUTH AND AGE.

WHAT fancy was it, Lady bright and fair,
To bind that wreath of leaves already sere,
That chaplet of the sad autumnal year,
Round thy young brows and on thy sunny hair ?
When life itself is fading, wilt thou wear
The coronal of age with such a grace,
With such a smile on such a happy face ?
What of thy youth shall Time, the spoiler, spare ?
Yet O ! may Spring late linger in the breast,
Though snows of Winter fall upon the head ;
And, as a child before she sinks to rest
By loving friends is duly visited,
May many a youthful memory be thy guest,
Waking thy silence with familiar tread !

SUNSHINE.

GIFT of the gods ! How on this dusky wall,
And far away on river, plain, and glen,
On all things lovely and unloved of men,
Equally floods the light celestial !—
Me the glad hours with sudden influence call
To wander in the spirit once again
To that half-fancied, half-remembered den
Of a weird woodland by a waterfall ;
Where the bright sunlight came through trellised
shade,
Where all things beautiful and sweet were found ;—
The dun fawns tripping through, from glade to glade ;
A wasteful wealth of flowers upon the ground ;
Silence intense, yet fairest music made,
And music most intense, yet not a sound.

AUTUMN, 1854.

I

THE chiller air that whistles as it blows,
 The smooth-shorn uplands with their lingering
 sheaves,
 The stream that in its fuller volume flows,
 And ah ! the falling leaves ;—

II

The sportsman's gun sharp echoing through the vale,
 The frosty clearness of the waning day,
 All sounds, all scents around us tell the tale
 Of Summer past away.

III

While yet the golden August days were long,
 Prescient of this, the shrill-voiced swifts had fled ;
 Wise birds that would not stay to sing their song
 When their delights were dead.

IV

Ah me ! how much of joy and hope and love
Fled with the birds, and shall not come again :
Not only is the brightness of the grove
Quenched by the Autumn rain ;

V

Not only are the dim leaves downward borne,
Not only are the shadowy branches sere :
For every leaf some heart is left forlorn
In every passing year.

VI

How much of love has lived its little time !
How much of joy has laughed itself away !
How many a friendship, fresh in Summer's prime,
Is dead and cold to-day !

VII

We know not of the tears that round us fall
As frequent as the raindrops on the sod,
Nor hear how many grief-choked voices call
For help and strength on God.

VIII

We cannot know what memories are stirred
By the known scenes we pass so lightly by ;
All Nature's sounds, by us so idly heard,
Bring tears to some sad eye.

IX

Be sure some memory lives in every breeze,
And wakes in all the seasons of the year ;
Some laughed their lightest under leafless trees,
To some is Summer dear ;—

X

Dear for the sake of recollected love,
Or scarce less dear for some remembered woe ;—
So like the thoughts that joy and sorrow move,
Recalled from long ago.

XI

And if no joy with Summer passed away
From us, if Autumn brings no present pain ;
Yet scarce may we refuse one tear to-day
For what comes not again.

XII

To-day our home with merry voices rings,
No loved ones lost, no stricken faces pale :—
Alas ! these days shall be departed things,
A half-remembered tale.

XIII

On us too misty shades of age shall fall
Peopled alone with phantoms of our youth ;
And we shall sit in silence and recall
Ghosts of our olden Truth.

GOOD-NIGHT.

I

GOOD-NIGHT ! the heavens are clear,
 The stars are gleaming bright,
 The fittest evening of the year
 To wish thee, love, good-night !

II

The livelong summer day
 I hung upon thine eyes ;
 We felt the red sun fade away,
 And the still moon arise.

III

Good-night ! the morn was fair,
 And golden was the noon,
 And dewy sweet the evening air,
 That parts us all too soon.

IV

Good-night ! one last good-night !
And one last parting prayer ;—
Shine all thy days as calmly bright,
Gleam all thy moons as fair !

SONG.

I

MY darling, though the sun to-night
 Should leave an angry sky,
 And though to-morrow's earliest light
 Should find the tempest high ;

II

Though every flower that blooms to-day
 Should broken be, and dead,
 And over all the garden way
 Untimely petals shed ;

III

Yet I, possessing none the less
 My summer sunlight clear,
 Look for a day of happiness
 Among the blossoms here.

IV

With you and each dear little one
Shall lightly pass the hours,
For you shall be my summer sun,
And they shall be my flowers.

AUTUMN.

I

F^{LUSHED} Autumn, with his golden crown,
And clusters of the vine,
Who comes when Summer's sun goes down
To tread the purple wine,—
Whose cheeks with honest toil are brown,
Who brings a feast to farm and town,
To you and me and mine ;—

II

Sad Autumn, tonehed with early frost,
Who thins the reddened leaves,
Who brings a message sad, and most
The mourner's spirit grieves,
For he speaks of early promise lost,
And of seas by winds untimely tossed,
And of snow among the sheaves.

III

What emblem shall befit him best ?
Shall I hate him, or fear, or love ?
Does he tell us of the ends possessed
For which our Summer strove ?
Or of human weakness late confessed ?
And is it in kindness or bitter jest
That he withers the wreaths we wove ?

IV

Or does he say, all passions here
Are laid to rest at last,
And all the visions of the year
In a wrack on his shore are cast ?
That hope is hope, and fear is fear,
But why should we waste a smile or a tear
On things that with Summer passed ?

V

O season ! whose mornings are misty and cold,
Whose sunlight is brief and still,
When the gossamer decks in fold on fold
Meadow and bank and hill,
And the skirts of whose evening skies are rolled
In purple and amethyst and gold,
And whose early nights are chill :

VI

Teach us the lesson that we need,
Whatever that lesson be ;
For surely he who runs may read
That his race is vanity,—
And surely voices there are, to lead
The halting steps of all souls that bleed
To peace and to rest, in thee !

WINTER.

(An Imitation.)

I

O LOOK, my friends ! the drift lies steep
 Piled on the Chilterns' glittering brow ;
 O hark ! within the woodland deep
 The trees lament their load of snow.

II

But we to keep the frost at bay
 Will see the fire burns bright and clear ;
 And you shall drink with me to-day
 A magnum of the comet year.

III

And leave the rest to Heaven ; for Heaven
 Can stay the tempest if it will :
 To-night—the very oaks are riven,
 To-morrow—and the lake is still.

IV

Yet who to-morrow's sky would know ?

To-night is ours, if we are wise ;
To-night my fathers' halls shall glow
With wit and wine and woman's eyes.

V

Fill high : let him who will decline ;
Let age and prudence be severe ;
But thou be glad that it is thine
To whisper love in beauty's ear ;

VI

To sigh and flatter not in vain,
In thine the yielding hand to press ;
To look in eyes that anger feign,
Yet ask thee for a new caress.

THE STORM.

I

RIGHT on the rocks she came beneath the night,
 The blinding mist drove heavy on the strand :
 Voices there were within her, warmth, and light,—
 Clouds and the tempest hid the iron land.

II

Ah ! fated vessel, full of hope and pride,
 One hour of life remains to you,—no more,—
 Then shrieks and struggles in the cruel tide,—
 Then the waves beating on a lifeless shore.

III

Ah ! was there none to save from such an end,
 No kindly beacon on the cliffs above,
 No warning voice of angel or of friend—
 Could knowledge nothing help, and nothing love ?

IV

Nothing to sail in such a gallant trim ?

Nothing the long experience of the seas ?

And to have known the Arctic noontides dim,

And the sweet airs of the Hesperides ?

V

But so, as some great warrior moves to death

With careless speech and triumph in his eyes,

Not knowing that he draws his latest breath,

Not knowing that to-day he surely dies ;—

VI

Through shoals and breakers harmless have you past,

With prow exultant and unriven sail,

Borne onward to predestined wreck at last

By the dark fate that follows in the gale.

INKERMANN.

(November 1854.)

I

THEY say, before the break of light,
When soldiers are to die,
Old warrior ghosts the livelong night
Sweep through the misty sky,
And that the echoing spear and shield
Ring dimly o'er the fated field.

II

And surely if the dead are stirred
By tidings of the brave,—
If ever sounds of life are heard
Across the silent grave,—
They felt the battle-thrill that ran
Above the vale of Inkermann.

III

Men told us England's heart was cold,
Her homes no heroes bore,
That honour was a thing of old,
And glory charmed no more :—
Even as they spoke we felt they lied,
And now we know how Cathcart died.

IV

How died they all ! the brave, the good,
The gallant, and the gay ;
Wrapt in that rolling mist they stood
To fling their lives away ;
Then closed upon the Russians' might
To show them how the free can fight.

V

And we who sit at home and weep
For those who come no more,
For all the precious dead who sleep
By the Euxine's sounding shore,
Yet smile we in our tears to know
How well our brothers met the foe.

VI

How fast their deadly volleys flashed,
How answered blow for blow,
While wave on wave upon them dashed
Up from the vale below,
Till through the eddying smoke and flame
The fiery Zouave charging came.

VII

Woe for the gallant dead and true
That heaped the cumbered plain !
What prayers were said at home for you,
The loved,—yet all in vain !
What joy went forth with you, what pride,
What trembling hopes,—and yet you died !

VIII

We waited till the tidings came
From o'er the wintry seas,
The fearful news that spread like flame
Borne on the eastern breeze,
How you had struggled long and well,
How like your fathers' sons you fell !

DAS SIEGESFEST.

(Schiller.)

I

PRIAM'S halls in ruin lying,
Ashes only left in Troy ;—
Many a Grecian booty-laden,
Many a soldier drunk with joy,
Sat upon his lofty vessel
On the Hellespont's fair strand
Ready for the happy journey,
Ready for the Grecian land :—
‘ Comrades, friends with me returning
Raise on high a festive strain,
We are bound for home again
Where our household fires are burning.’

II

But in long array lamenting
Sat the Trojan women there,
Sadly striking on their bosoms—
Pale and with dishevelled hair ;
And amid the wild rejoicing
Came their mournful monotone,
As they sang their homes' undoing
In a low unheeded moan :
‘ Farewell to our pleasures fled !
From a fallen home we go
Slaves of an insulting foe,
Only happy are the dead.’

III

Calchas at the laden altar
Calls on many a holy name,
And invokes the might of Heaven
As he lights the odorous flame,—
Pallas, pride and dread of nations,
Neptune, girder of the land,

Jove, who strikes the flash of terror

From the ægis in his hand :—

‘ All is suffered, all is done,

And our foe has fallen at last,

And the fated years are past,

And the mighty city won.’

IV

Atreus’ son, the princely leader,

Reckons up his hosts again,

Whom he brought from distant Aulis

Unto dark Scamander’s plain ;

And the clouds of gloomy sorrow

Gather on his kingly brow,

For he sees of countless thousands

Only these returning now :—

‘ Therefore raise a careless strain,

Ye who see the light of day,

Ye who take your homeward way;

Few are bound for Greece again.’

V

‘ Yet not all who now are parting
Shall possess their homes in joy,
Even at the household altar
Can a felon stroke destroy ;
Some shall find at home a traitor
Whom the foemen’s weapons spare ;’—
Thus Ulysses spake his warning
With a god-inspired air :—
‘ Happy he whose wife is true,
Happy he whose home is sure !
Scarce will woman’s faith endure,
And the wicked seeks the new.’

VI

Prize of all the fatal contest,
In her husband’s arms at rest ;
Menelaus, happy victor,
Holds his Helen to his breast.
Wrong and crime must go to ruin,
And the evil punished be,

For the gods they rule in Heaven,
And upright is their decree :—
‘ Evils on the evil fall,
Evil on the faithless guest ;
Jove, who judgeth all things best,
Seeth and avengeth all.’

VII

‘ Ye the living, ye the happy,’
Cries Oileus’ gallant son ;
‘ Ye can praise the powers sitting
On Olympus’ awful throne.
Yet their gifts they give at random,
And by chance their favours come,
For Patroclus lieth buried,
And Thersites saileth home :—
Blindly all their gifts they give,
Blindly falleth destiny ;
Therefore raise a song on high
Ye that have the lot to live ! ’

VIII

‘ Yes, the war has snatched the noblest,
And for ever shall the Greek,
When he holds his solemn feast-day,
Of thy deeds of valour speak,
O my brother ! his defender
When the ships were wrapt in flame ;
Yet to yonder crafty coward
All the prize of honour came :—
Sleep thou in thy quiet rest,
Never vanquished by a foe ;
Ajax fell by Ajax’ blow,
It was madness slew the best.’

IX

Then his son to great Achilles
Proudly pours the votive wine :—
‘ Far above all earthly honour,
Mighty father, shineth thine !
Far above all earthly fortune
Do I count a noble name,

And when low the body lieth
Still to live in deathless fame :—
Men unborn shall tell thy glory,
For a thousand ages long
Heroes live in endless song,
Mortal life is but a story.'

x

' If the voice of song be silent,'
Thus great Tydeus' son began,
' I myself will bear my witness,
And will praise a conquered man ;
I will tell of gallant Heetor
For his altars fighting well ;—
If ye praise the arm that vanquished,
Praise the noble heart that fell—
Him who for his country bled,
Him who many a fearful day
Kept your closing ranks at bay,—
Let his foemen praise the dead ! '

XI

He that lived three generations,
Nestor with a jovial mien
Stretches out a laurelled beaker
To the weeping Phrygian queen :—
' Drain it off, that draught Lethean,
It can wash away thy smart ;
Mighty Bacchus worketh wonders,
And can heal the broken heart ;—
Drain it, lady, and forget :
Wine will cure the deepest smart,
Wine will heal the broken heart,
And a bound to sorrow set.

XII

' Even Niobe, all wretched,
Whom immortals hated so,
She could taste the golden vintage,
And constrain her mighty woe ;
For whenever from the goblet
To the lips the red streams swell,

Is the deepest sorrow banished
And the saddest heart is well ;—
And whenever foams that stream
On the eager lips of men,
Bruised souls are whole again,
Pain and grief but phantoms seem.'

XIII

Last of all the sad Cassandra
Rose the lofty ships among ;
As she saw the smoking ruins,
Lifting high her fateful song :—
‘ Smoke, and less than smoke, are mortals ;
As yon vaporous pillars wane,
So all earthly powers shall vanish,
Only shall the gods remain ;—
By the rider on his way,
By the sailor sitteth sorrow :
Who is sure of his to-morrow ?
Let us live our life to-day ! ’

ILL TIDINGS.

I

O LADY, thy first-born is dead !
 O mother, thy darling lies low !
 But he died when his comrades had fled,
 But he fell with his face to the foe.

II

To the mother that bare him in pain,
 And that tended his childhood with care,
 Of him cometh nothing again,
 No token nor lock of his hair.

III

O mother ! great sorrow is thine
 For the joyous, the honest, the brave—
 That the brilliant no longer shall shine,
 That the youthful is gone to his grave !

IV

O lady, but great is thy pride
For a son and a soldier so true !
In the place of his duty he died
At the task that God gave him to do.

WRECK.

I

UNDISTINCT in the distance and black,
Piled high upon Mona's wild shore,
Lie the fragments of navies in wrack,
That gallant and hopeful of yore
Light hearts and rich merchandise bore.

II

They are piled undistinguished and dim,
They are named and remembered no more ;
Unless on the world's utmost rim
Some trafficker telling his store
Speaks of losses on Mona's wild shore.

III

So they who are faring through life,
Baffled oft by the tempests of fate,
How much have they lost in the strife
That never, or early or late,
Shall they find at the day's golden gate !

IV

The jettisons made of dear hopes,
The brands half-consumed of old fires,
Loves parted like axe-sundered ropes,
And wan forms of unburied desires
Lie thick where the coast-line retires.

V

Abandoned on life's farthest shore,
Across the wide ocean of years
Lie the waifs that the hurricane bore
Far away from to-day's hopes and fears,—
Far off, and too distant for tears.

Yet, once and again, as there lifts
The darkness that broods in the skies,
Through the tempest that changes and drifts
Can be seen the lost treasure that lies
Where the waves round the headland uprise.

NACHRUF.

(From the German.)

I

UP yonder steps thy foot but now has past,
 Thy presence tenanted this silent room,
 On thee the moonlight through those leaves was cast,
 For thee the lawns were gay with summer bloom.

II

Thy seat was by the shining casement there,
 Old memories of the past within thy breast :
 Here hast thou slept, and with a whispered prayer
 Charmed all thy sorrows to a dreamless rest.

III

And thou hast gone ; and with thy gentle grace
 The Angel of this house has past away ;
 And I—woe's me !—have stepped into thy place—
 Wild singer of an unmelodious lay.

IV

And, sitting here alone, it seems to me
As if these walls had knowledge and had speech ;
As if the trees and gardens spoke of thee
In language which my senses cannot reach.

V

O ! that I understood : the words they speak
Perchance might roll away this load of pain,
Bring coolness to this hot and wasted cheek,
Give tears and slumber to these eyes again.

VI

For, day and night, this only would I see,
And, seeing not, my very soul is riven.
O loved and lost ! if thou dost think of me,
And thinking of me if thou hast forgiven !

ASTROLOGY.

I

O READ, sweet student of the night,
 Thy lesson, for the skies are fair ;—
 See if Orion's sword be bright,
 How shines the splendour of the Bear !

II

Look how the streamers of the North
 Throb rosy light across the sky—
 How the wild meteors bursting forth
 Shoot into nothingness and die !

III

To-night the skies are oracles
 Of all that mortal man would learn,
 And in their depths a spirit dwells
 Writing in sentences that burn.

IV

And happy be the words that fall,
O fair Astrologer, to thee ;
May Heaven's handwriting mystical
Show thee some answer well to see !

V

I sit within the panelled gloom
Of walls for years unvisited,
The tenant of a ghostly room
Hung with the pictures of the dead.

VI

And distant, in the dark recess
Of yonder mullioned oriel,
I watch thee reading motionless
Some horoscope thou lovest well—

VII

Learning the language of the skies,
And listening what the planets say,
And following with those earnest eyes
The hosts of Heaven upon their way.

LIGHT AND SHADE.

I

ALL the day our steps have been
Through these woodland pathways green ;
Round us has the summer air
Made a melody so fair,
That it almost seemed to me
We could hear a distant sea,
As we lingered through the glade
Half in light and half in shade.

II

O forgive me ! if my mood
Has been silent, strange and rude ;
If companionship like mine
Has been little worthy thine :
Doubt not I have watched the while
Every gesture, every smile,—
Treasured all that has been said
Underneath this happy shade.

III

Let us rest a little here
By this water welling clear,
Dropping down from stone to stone
With a music all its own,
Though we scarce can see it pass
Through the interwoven grass—
Here is sunlight worthy thee,
Here is shadow fit for me.

IV

I will go awhile apart
With the trouble at my heart,
Until silence has repressed
All the folly of my breast,
Till mine eyes can bear to turn
With a wiser unconcern
Unto thee, O lady bright !—
From the shadow to the light.

V

Many things I longed to say,
But the hope has passed away
With the dreams that cheated me
Of a life that cannot be,
Of a love to answer mine,
Of a future half divine :—
They were phantoms of the night,
Shadows that are scared by light,—

VI

Idle thoughts I dare not tell—
O forgive them, and farewell !
Grant me only, as I stand,
One last pressure of the hand,
One last look for me to prize
From the quiet of thine eyes
Ere I pass away from sight
Into darkness out of light.

VOTA.

I

IRENE, with the steadfast eyes,
 Yet standing on the shore of life,
 Yet ignorant of storm or strife,
 What art can tell thy destinies ?

II

If wishes have a power to bless,
 Thy days be crowned with perfect ends,
 With ‘honour, love and troops of friends,’
 And wealth, if wealth be happiness.

III

A radiant youth, a quiet age ;
 Then, undismayed and undistrest,
 Among thy children loved and blest,
 To close the peaceful pilgrimage.

IV

Yet, dearest, if my idle hope,
Shaping a future from thy face
As gentle as its gentle grace,
Has drawn too fair a horoscope ;—

V

And if the common lot be thine,
If pain must dim those tender eyes,
Pass through the ills that round thee rise
Upholden by a strength divine !

VI

A noble life, a glad release
From all the sorrows of the way ;
And when thou hast fulfilled the day,
The end be, like the morning, peace !

MY LADY SLEEPS.

—γλυκερὸν καὶ ἐγέρσιμον ὕπνον.

I

SLEEP sound, dear love ! Though the winds be
high,

And the dark clouds drift through the troubled
sky,

Though the rising waters foam and roar,
And mournfully howl round the tortured shore,—
Ill sounds from thy slumbers be far away,
And soft be thy dreams as a summer day !

II

Sleep sound ! Though the world be weary with fears,
And eyes that love thee be sad with tears,
Yet never a sorrow break thy rest,
And never a pang shoot through thy breast,
No shadow pass o'er thy closèd eyes,
But their visions be visions of Paradise !

III

Sleep sound, sweet love ! Till the morning light
Lead up the new day with its fresh delight ;
Till the welcome sun, as it mounts above,
Recall thee to duty, and peace, and love,—
To a calm existence untouched by strife,
And the quiet round of a holy life !

A PLEASANT PATH.

DOWN the slant copsewood to the stile
I loitered, hanging on thy smile,—
We talked of pleasant things the while.

For all things pleasant were in thee,—
Things seen and things as yet to see,
What had been and what was to be.

How loverlike the trees inclined,
As if with all a lover's mind
For long embraces intertwined !

How loverlike the wind was sighing ;
What hollow cadences replying,
Sad as if love and hope were dying !

Yet all was bright and all was well,
Hearts lighter than our words could tell,
And sunshine indescribable !

A DYING FALL.

I

I WILL not call you, love, untrue,
 If only when to-morrow calls,
 For him who loved and lived for you
 One teardrop falls :—

II

If only, when the guns shall tell
 That the great battle has been fought,
 To him who blessed you as he fell
 You give one thought.

III

One tear to grace his funeral,
 One thought upon his nameless grave,
 For he shall lie as he will fall—
 Among the brave.

IV

Then be your life begun anew,
Love one and be beloved by all !
I will not call you, love, untrue,
Though I must fall.

SEPARATION.

I

FILL high, my friends ! to-night is ours,
 To-night kind speech and cordial hand ;
 To-morrow—and the early showers
 Blot from our eyes the lessening strand.

II

Fill high to those who love us well,
 Or seem to love us,—who can know ?
 O folly ! for our last farewell
 Shall be forgotten ere we go.

III

And whom should our departing grieve ?
 Such guests are borne by every wind.
 We—what are we—that hope to leave
 Remembrance and regret behind ?

IV

Only, too pleasant was the shore,
Too sweet its songs, too fair its smiles ;
And well for us that sail and oar
Shall bear us from these golden isles—

V

Shall bear us down to other skies,
Past barren shores, through adverse foam,
Until there vanish from our eyes
This vision of a happy home !

CHANGE.

I

FAINT incense hung upon the air,
 The priest's last blessing had been said,
 Yet still she knelt in silent prayer,
 Left with the memories of the dead.

II

Fair sculptured saints with endless smile
 Looked down upon the mortal's woe,
 And, distant in the darkened aisle,
 The fading tapers flickered low.

III

Widowed and childless ! Far away
 For his dear country died her lord :—
 They told her, as he fell he lay,
 And knightlike grasped his shattered sword.

IV

And outside, in the moonlight wan,
Where ghostlike elms their tresses wave,
The minster's shadow falls upon
A little cross, a little grave.

V

Widowed and childless ! Who can know
The anguish of her shuddering prayer ?
Pass by her, brothers : let us go
From sorrow that we may not share.

VI

Short time ago we saw her move
The worship of our wondering eyes,
And, brighter for the light of love,
Grow into all our auguries.

VII

Her husband's arm around her east,
And bending to her child's caress,
So throughg our trivial world she passed
The perfect type of happiness.

VIII

And now—what utter change is there !

Not that her face or form are old ;
Not that upon her lustrous hair
Dim silver streaks the shining gold.

IX

The same, yet not the same ; for now
Still young the load of age she bears,
And carries on her patient brow
A grief too sorrowful for tears.

X

This is the change that darkens life ;
Not duller eyes or feebler brain,
But knowing that the ceaseless strife
Takes friends that will not come again ;—

XI

Steals one by one the gifts of youth,
Gifts swiftly lost as freely given—
The poet-dreams that clothed the truth
About us with a light of heaven ;—

XII

The hopes high wrought, yet scarce expressed,
That faded into sober day;
And Love, that like an angel guest
Came unawares, and passed away.

XIII

This shall no earthly comfort heal,
This dread we at the hands of fate,—
To look into our hearts, and feel
Its chambers lone and desolate.

A RETURN.

I

HE stood once more upon that airy brow,
 And saw the vale beneath him, whence upswells
 A hum of life from out the world below,
 And all the fitful music of the bells.

II

Old well-remembered friends before him lay ;—
 The willow-bordered stream, the cross-crowned
 spire,
 The clock that rings with footsteps of the day,
 The thin blue smoke from many a happy fire.

III

Below him surged the old rook-haunted trees,
 Far off the uplands slept serenely blue,
 And, over all, the children of the breeze
 Soft summer clouds their dreamy shadows threw.

IV

No change is here. Eternal nature smiles
Unmoved for human love and life and tears ;
And harmlessly as Ocean round his isles
Rolls the swift current of the silent years.

V

And yet how changed to him who mourns for dead
Feelings and friends that fled, ah me, how fast !
Who mourns not such that wakens with his tread
The lonely echoes of the sleeping Past ?

VI

Whose eyes are dry, that wandering apart
Slow lingers through a home long lost and loved ?
There are some memories touch the sternest heart,
And at rare moments hardest men are moved.

VII

Who will not weep upon the grave of youth,
Wondering to find the turf above so green ?
Who has not tears to shed for early truth
And all that has been, and that might have been.

VIII

From this loved home over a hemisphere
Came dreams that spoke of early hope and light ;
And now—it seems a dream that he is here,
Some sad illusion of a weary night.

IX

For—when he dreamed—he heard his brothers call,
He saw his mother's patient pitying eye :
And now,—alone his measured footsteps fall
By the dark river rolling silently.

X

And—when he dreamed—he was a boy again,
And laughed and lived again his golden life :
And now,—the bitter sense of self-wrought pain,
And the ill memories of guilt and strife !

XI

Weep, weep, poor wretch, beneath the moaning trees ;
Weep for the voices stilled, the silent home :—
Then forth once more upon life's angry seas
To toss and labour on the tossing foam !

THE KNIGHT OF CLEE.

I

IT was a maiden made her moan
 Upon the hills of Clee,
 And wept upon a rugged stone
 Beneath a weeping tree.

II

Her knight was false, was false, she said,
 Her dearest love unkind ;
 He swore to keep his tryst, she said,
 Come battle, storm, or wind.

III

But ah ! she said, some fancy new
 Has wiled his heart away ;
 He, that so faithful was and true,
 Has broken faith to-day.

IV

Ah ! surely, maiden, fate or war,
Or something else than will,
Has kept the faithful knight afar
That he is not on the hill.

V

Something ;—but not that he forgets
A face and form so rare,
Or cares not that the tempest wets
The tresses of thy hair.

VI

Yet still she fed her grief anew,
And still she made her moan
Beneath the moaning tree that grew
Out of the rugged stone.

VII

Him the meanwhile swoln Severn's wave,
From Worcester's treacherous shore,
By bloody Tewkesbury's reverend nave—
By Gloucester's abbey bore.

VIII

By Berkeley's towers, a fearsome sight,
The murdered knight of Clee,
That should have kept his tryst to-night,
Was floated out to sea.

ONCE FOES, ALWAYS FRIENDS.

I

IN a minster far down in the vales of the West
By a cunning hand carved lie two warriors at rest,
Spurred, belted, and mailed, with white face turned
to face,

So they sleep, interchanging an endless embrace.

II

‘Once foes, always friends ;’ only this, nothing more
To tell of the name and the lineage they bore ;
‘Once foes, always friends ;’ this the legend alone
With *Orate pro animis* cut in the stone.

III

How lived they, or when ? On what times were they
cast ?

And they yielded their lives in what fight of the past ?
O for eyes to look back through the ages of gloom,
And to read the dark riddle they left on their tomb !

IV

Were they brothers, or closer than brothers in truth ?
And what cloud came between them to darken their
youth ?

Did it rise from beneath ? was it sent from above ?
Was it war or religion, ambition or love ?

V

Or was it, in days scarcee remembered and far,
On a desperate field of some old civil war,
That long parted they met in unconscious career,
And that each fell at length by his brother's blind
spear ?

VI

Who can see? who can tell ? Only this can we know—
That those still marble faces were carved long ago ;
For the sake of that pair pious masses were said,
And the pomp of religion rolled over the dead.

VII

They have slept their long slumber, and smiled their
calm smile,
Though Cromwell's stern troopers were housed in the
aisle,
Nothing hurt by the tempest of war as it passed,
Or the rage of the Puritan iconoclast.

VIII

Let us trust, nothing doubting, that tale of their life,
That their love was unending, and short was their
strife ;
Here at least, in this tomb, the brief rivalry ends,
And—*Orate pro animis*—for they were friends.

THE RIVALS.

I

THREE knights of lineage knightly
For the love of a maiden fair,
For the light that lies in her lustrous eyes
And the sheen of her yellow hair,
Have given their nights to watching
And their weary days to care.

II

The first is a gallant soldier
Who fiery deeds hath done,
Who in open fight with main and might
His golden spurs hath won ;—
And he sighs and swears, (but most he swears,)
He shall be the chosen one.

III

The second, a gentle scholar,
Who dwells by Isis' shore,
Hath learned all rhymes of the ancient times
And their long-forgotten lore ;—
And he woos her in such verses
As never were heard before.

IV

But the third is a knight of worship,
Whom vassals and hinds obey,
Where his castle stands on his broad rich lands
Stretching long roods away ;—
And he comes and looks, though little he speaks,
For little he has to say.

V

And the lady smiles on the soldier
Most of the rival three ;
And she listens long to the scholar's song,
For she loves such minstrelsy ;—
But never the less I think I can guess
Which knight will the victor be.

NEAR HIS END.

I

DID you mark him pass up by the hedgerow,
 Faint and reeling, with low drooping tail ?
 He was black with the stains of the moorland,
 And red with the soil of the vale.

II

You could tell that his moments were numbered,
 And, caitiff and fox though he be,
 Almost you felt pity a creature
 So hunted and weary to see.

III

He has come by the yards and the homesteads,
 The scenes of his forays of old ;
 He has roused in the coppice the pheasant,
 And scared huddled sheep in the fold.

IV

And still for the place of his refuge
He holds on with resolute will,—
For the earths by the lonely gorse covert
High up on the slope of the hill.

V

Yet in vain, for his fate is upon him,
Close and loud the avengers behind,
That have raced him across the low country,
Since they found, fifty minutes up wind.

VI

He is fated ;—and birds of ill omen
Traitor-like are pursuing his way,
As they hover exultant above him—
The evil-tongued magpie and jay.

VII

His thefts and his triumphs are over,
He shall never rob henroost again,
Never come down at night from the hillside
To feast on the spoils of the plain.

VIII

This only last honour is left him,
To fall without terror or cry,
And—true son of a long line of robbers—
Unrepentant and silent to die.

MANUMISSUS.

I

Is it so that we meet again,
 O maid with the beautiful eyes ?
 I have cherished through years of pain
 Old hopes and old memories ;—
 And you greet me with calm disdain
 And the look of a cold surprise.

II

Perhaps it is better so ;
 But I had not learned to forget
 That our whispers were sad and low,
 And our foolish eyes were wet,
 And we trembled, long ago,
 The last time that we met.

III

III

When we yielded our passive boat
To the will of the mighty stream ;
When we watched the lilies afloat,
Saw the stars of Summer gleam,
And the nightingale's thrilling note
Was the melody of our dream.

IV

Shall I tell you the word you said
At the witching time of night,
As we passed from the willow glade
Out into the waters bright,—
From the true and tender shade
To the cold and elfish light ?

V

Shall I tell you that little word
The life of my life has been ;
That nothing these ears have heard,
And nothing these eyes have seen,
The depth of my heart has stirred
Like your memory, Geraldine ?

VI

It was but a vision of youth,
Your careless voice will say,
To dream that a woman's truth
Could last for a summer's day ;
And I thank you,—for in sooth
That fancy has fled away.

VII

I have loved, and I was wrong ;
But upon me a spell was cast,
And to-day, like an idle song,
The hope of a life has past :—
The enchantress that held me long
Has broken her charm at last.

THE NEW FOREST, 1860.

—*ω βάθος ὑλῆς**Mύριον*—

I

THOU dweller in the dusky town,
 When April stirs the waking year,
 Quit toil or pleasure, and come down
 To drink a draught of Nature here
 From hills and woods as charming yet
 As for the kings Plantagenet !

II

The buds are purple on the trees—
 Not wholly clothed nor wholly bare,
 Half turning from the unseen seas
 To woo the softer inland air ;
 And fair the russet boughs between,
 The larch is specked with tender green.

III

Fair too the little forest stream
By some undying fountain fed,
That hurries in a silver gleam
Above its tawny gravel bed ;—
On high the heron flapping slow
Watches his hunting-grounds below.

IV

Fair sights and sounds ! The cuckoo's song,
The blackcocks curling on the heath,
The wood-pigeon's soft tale of wrong,
And, as we list with bated breath,
Far—from the landscape's azure bounds—
There comes the distant cry of hounds.

V

Come, pass beneath the oaken grove
By silver birch and hollies' sheen,—
Speak of the memories we love,
Muse on the sorrows we have seen,
While gleams, through boughs that interlace,
Make 'sunshine in a shady place.'

VI

Here in this sylvan solitude,
This pleasaunce of the Norman kings,
Is quiet for our pensive mood ;—
Less loudly here the Present rings,
Only across our path are cast
The mighty shadows of the Past.

VII

Such fairy scenes, when life was new,
We pictured, hanging on the page
That tells of Una's champion true
Dogged by the crafty Archimage ;—
Or, fired with a chivalrous glow,
We rode such glades with Ivanhoe.

VIII

These fairy scenes in very truth
Heard the great Conqueror's bugle call,
And, in our nation's freshest youth,
Saw his Red son's untimely fall,
Who ceased from wild ambition's stir
To sleep in classic Winchester.

IX

Men say they wasted town and tower,
Changed homesteads to a savage glen,
Their lives a stern abuse of power;—
And yet they sinned like mighty men ;
Here sought they, riding from afar,
Brief pastime from a life of war.

X

Do we their sons, who hold their place,
The children of this later day,
A vacant and unwarlike race,
Deserve a nobler name than they ?
We reap the pleasures of the soil,
The harvest—but without the toil.

XI

Are we a race degenerate ?
What answer shall the future give,
When some fierce struggle, soon or late,
Shall bid our glory die or live,—
Shall try us if we stand or yield
Before our foes of many a field ?

XII

High questions these ;—and yet we feel
That England's heart is mighty still,
Remembering the serried steel
On Inkermann's heroic hill,—
Thinking on Lucknow's leaguered wall,—
The odds at Delhi's siege and fall.

XIII

Meanwhile across the narrow seas
Come, month by month, and year by year,
Dim warnings borne upon the breeze,
And sounds of tempest and of fear ;—
Kings plotting for a yard of earth,
And nations in the throes of birth.

DONNINGTON CASTLE, BERKSHIRE.

WHERE the twin towers are bosomed in the tree
They say that Chaucer lived when time was
young,
Who first struck music from the English tongue.
Had he foreknowledge of the bards to be ?
Heard he their strains like voices of a sea
On distant shores in long procession flung ?
His splendid harp not yet had Shakespeare strung,
Nor vocal yet was Milton's melody ;
And still unforged in Time's vast cavern lay
The thousand links of sweetness, fair and strong,
The chain of lyric, of heroic song,
That thralls the souls of men who live to-day.
We serve great masters. He from fountains new
Here fresh and pure the living waters drew.

TAMISE RIPE.

'A praty town by Tamise ripe.'—LELAND.

I

OF 'Tamise ripe' old Leland tells ;
I read, and many a thought npswells
Of Nature in her loveliest dress,
Of peaceful homes of happiness —
Deep-meadowed farms, sheep-sprinkled downs,
Fair bridges with their 'praty towns '
By Tamise ripe.

II

Stirred by the pulse of many oars
That glide between the summer shores,
I love the waters fresh and clear,
And all the changes of the year,
Down to late Autumn's ruddy woods,
And volume of the Winter floods

By Tamise ripe.

III

The waving tresses of the weeds,
The water's ripple in the reeds,
The plunging lasher cold and bright
Making sweet music to the night,
Old spires, and many a lordly grove,—
All these there are, and more, to love

On Tamise ripe.

IV

Dear Oxford with her crown of towers,
Fair Eton in her happy bowers,
The reach by Henley broadly spread,
High Windsor with her royal dead,
And Richmond's lawns and Hampton's glades—
What shore has memories and shades
Like Tamise ripe ?

v

Not vine-crowned Rhine, or Danube's flood,
Or sad Ticino red with blood ;
Not ice-born Rhone or laughing Seine,
Or all the golden streams of Spain ;—
But dearer far to English eyes,
And bound with English destinies,
Is Tamise ripe.

VI

High up, on Danesfield's guarded post
Great Alfred turned the heathen host ;
Below, the vaults of Hurley sent
An evil king to banishment ;
And yet more sacred was the deed
Done on the isle by Runnymede
On Tamise ripe.

VII

And down where commerce stains the tide
Lies London in her dusky pride,
Deep in dim wreaths of smoke infurled,
A wonder of the modern world :
How much to love within the walls
That lie beneath the shade of ' Paul's '
By Tamise ripe !

VIII

And if, which God in heaven forefend !
On us the alien foe descend,
The stream we love has many a son
To fight and win as Alfred won ;
High deeds shall illustrate the shore,
And freedom shall be saved once more
 On Tamise ripe.

THE SEA-KING'S GRAVE.

I

HE was a mighty Rover
Who lies beneath this mound
That sea-winds bluster over
And sea-birds scream around.

II

No fitter place whereunder
A sea-king's grave should be—
Lulled by the rolling thunder
Of the stormy German Sea.

III

Long ages since they laid him
To slumber where he fell ;
Long ages since they made him
This rude sepulchral cell ;

IV

And dragged ashore his galley
To serve him for a bier,
Here where the shallow valley
Comes seaward from the mere ;

V

And where the sluggish river
Flows slowly to the strand,
They heaped to lie for ever,
O'er ship and chief the sand.

VI

He was a mighty Rover,
For he swept the British seas
From the shining cliffs of Dover
To the farthest Orcades.

VII

There was terror in the haven
And mourning on the shore,
Where he brought the Danish raven
And the hosts that bowed to Thor.

VIII

For he came to kill and pillage,
And he carried blood and flames
Through shrine and farm and village
From Whitby unto Thames.

IX

And he spoiled with scornful laughter
Halls of abbot and of earl,
And left death and blackened rafter
In the cottage of the churl.

X

And we who sail in quiet
Along the peaceful land,
Or on summer mornings lie at
Ease on the yellow sand ;

XI

And watch each shade that passes
Across the nameless mound,
Where yellow scanty grasses
Scarce hide the barren ground :

I

XII

We little dream the Rover
In his vessel rests beneath,
As a sword when wars are over
Lies rusting in its sheath.

XIII

Fit resting place ! upon her
He slew and fought and toiled ;
And was laid to sleep in honour
Within the land he spoiled.

A DAY'S FISHING.

I

SWEET stream, that clearer art than glass,
 Here once again I come
 Some few glad hours by thee to pass
 A wanderer from my home.

II

Be favourable, sky, to-day,
 Grant me my utmost wish,
 And give to me my modest prey,
 Some little store of fish !

III

The pleasure that I take to wet
 My slender horsehair line,
 It is no pleasure with regret
 Like revelry or wine.

IV

I come with thoughts and footsteps free
The smoky town from out,
And linger, gentle stream, by thee
And watch the springing trout.

V

The burn that down the mountain falls
For me is all too rude,
And with too hoarse a trouble calls
Upon its solitude.

VI

Not such art thou,—what name to bear
It liketh thee the best,
Or Kennet swift, or Itchen clear,
Or Lamborne else, or Test.

VII

Such names they have—the pleasant streams
By which I love to walk,
Whose brimming course through meadows gleams
From cradles in the chalk.

VIII

Whose murmur gentle is and deep,
Answering to pleasant sounds
Of lazy kine and garrulons sheep
In happy pasture grounds.

IX

The wood-pigeon soft sorrow tells
Out of the high tree-tops ;
The cuckoo's voice like silver bells
Comes ringing o'er the copse.

X

Now woods are rich with leafy June,
Now longest is the day,
Most liquid is the songster's tune,
And whitest hangs the May.

XI

Sweet is it underneath the trees
To shelter from the sun,
To whistle for the loitering breeze,
And wish the shower begun.

XII

And sweet, while falls the plashing rain,
To draw with careful hand,
The slight rod bending with the strain,
My struggling prey to land.

XIII

Or, while the noontide hour I rest,
In visionary ken
To see in antique garments dressed
Shades of old fishermen.

XIV

Some monk, perhaps, of figure spare,
And worn ascetic look,
Comes wandering from yon cloister fair,
And throws his feathered hook.

XV

Though long ago his Abbey lies
In ruins scant and grey,
Once rose these trout for him, as rise
These trout for me to-day.

XVI

Oft has he strayed these waters by
And caught the spotted spoil,
Not dreaming that his faith should die
For ever from the soil :

XVII

Like me, with pleasant thoughts in throng,
And dreams of false and true,
And many a memory of old song,
And many a gleam of new.

XVIII .

Doubtless, as now, the miller leant
Over his little court ;
And, as to-day, a greeting sent,
And wished the father sport.

XIX

At eve the abbot riding past,
(The parson passed but now,)
Marked how the trout were rising fast,
And watched his brother throw.

XX

And when the shadows darker fell
He gathered up his store,
And homeward went his sport to tell
At the refectory door.

XXI

But I, whenever night may fall,
Bound for a happier home,
Shall hear the little voices call
In joy that I am come.

XXII

The life he lived was not like ours,
His creed was not as mine,
Yet knew he well these selfsame seours,
And where to throw his line.

XXIII

And many a figure more has trod
The banks to-day I tread,
And deftly plied the taper rod
Above the river bed.

XXIV

Elizabethan bards, who loved
The music of the brooks,
Here in my very footsteps moved
With shining store of hooks.

XXV

And Jacobean sages came,
And worthies Caroline ;
And he—the very chiefest name
Of brothers of the line—

XXVI

Old Izaak, with equipment quaint,
Who tells with quaintier pen
How Jesus loved to choose a saint
Chiefly from fishermen.

XXVII

Still are his pages redolent
Of shadows deep and cool,
Of meadows with May blossoms sprent,
And many a lucid pool.

XXVIII

Almost beneath yon spreading beech
I look to see him laid,
Striving with old world lore to teach
Some bungler at his trade.

XXIX

Almost I fancy I shall see
His rods amid the grass,
His ‘angles placed at usury’
Until the rain shall pass.

XXX

He fished down stream, and every cast
Methinks a trout he drew ;—
Ah ! simple trouts in days long past,
I would I fished for you.

XXXI

And after him a figure grave,
A Georgian wigged divine,
Wise Paley, thoughtful by the wave,
Throws workmanlike his line

XXXII

Well loved he his philosophy,
Yet better still to feel
A fish in season on his fly,
And hear the ringing reel.

XXXIII

Nor less expert, Sir Humphry walked
A fisher by these woods,
And pleasantly the while he talked
Of distant Styrian floods.

XXXIV

He, wearied with his studious hours
And cabalistic books,
Found health among the springing flowers,
And rest beside the brooks.

XXXV

See then of what a gentle race
A quiet angler springs ;
What pleasant fancies give a grace
To all his wanderings

XXXVI

Not all the din of any day,
Not all the city's press,
Shall ever wholly take away
His sense of happiness.

XXXVII

One day he spends among the streams
In meadows bright and clear,
And carries off a wealth of dreams
To last him for a year. .

THE WISHING WELL.

*'Quanto præstantius esset
Numen aquæ, viridi si margine clauderet undas
Herba, nec ingenuum violarent marmora tophum.'*

I

VOICE of this region fabulous !
For silent else is all the air,
None else remains to tell to us
The story of the things that were :—

II

Fair Fountain of this valley lone !
That falling with a ceaseless plaint
Into thy cup of sculptured stone,
Speakest of Fairy and of Saint.

III

For name of either thou hast borne :
Time was Titania by thee played ;
And rings by elfish footsteps worn
Still linger in the magic glade.

IV

But when the Benedictine came
To build upon these meadows fair,
He called thee by a holier name,
And blessed thy source with book and prayer ;

V

And said the old belief was sin :—
Yet still, so ran the rustic creed,
Strange voices sounded, faint and thin,
By summer nights along the mead.

VI

And whether it were Saint or Fay,
Blessing or magic,—who could tell ?
Men said that virtue in thee lay,
And loved thee as the ‘Wishing Well.’

VII

And still thy chalice carved of stone,
Though old beliefs have past away,
Though Fairy and though Saint be gone,
Brims with clear crystal day by day.

VIII

And waiting here an idle while,
And looking with a listless eye,
I see beneath thy waters smile
The changeless azure of the sky—

IX

The changeless azure flecked with grey,
That was as deep, as fair, as clear,
Or ever down the woodland way
The first wild savage wandered here ;—

X

Or ever man thy dwelling knew,
And, resting on the virgin sod,
Looked wondering on the imaged blue,
And blessed thee as the gift of God.

XI

And, if there still be power in thee
To grant the wishes we conceive ;
If it avail implicitly
The old tradition to believe :—

XII

Give me, fair stream,—not gold nor love,
Not fortune high nor length of days,
Not force to rise the crowd above,
Nor the deceit of human praise :

XIII

But this ;—that like thy waters clear,
Though creeds and systems come and go,
Unvexed within a narrow sphere
My life with even stream may flow—

XIV

May flow, and fill its destined space,
With this at least of blessing given,
Upwards to gaze with fearless face,
And mirror back some truth of Heaven !

THE CHURCHYARD BY THE THAMES.

I

WHERE throws the church's solid tower
 Its shadow on the frequent graves,
And bears unmoved the wintry shower,
 And every idle wind that raves,—

II

I wander through the solemn ways,
 And listen to the hollow bell,
That measures out to us our days,
 And warns us that we use them well.

K

III

Alas ! in vain : how many here
 Have heard and heeded not the sound,
 Cumbered the earth from year to year,
 And cumber now this holy ground.

IV

How many in this quiet vale
 With strength to wage a noble strife,
 Once hoisted high a gallant sail,
 Yet drifted down the stream of life !

V

Ah ! whither ? what their destiny
 No mortal dreamer here may tell,
 Save that beneath this turf they lie,
 Save that this tower has rung their knell.

VI

Their haunts are worn by other feet
 Where the broad river cleaves the plain,
 Now shrinking in the summer heat,
 Now turbid with the winter's rain.

VII

Yet some that ran a better race,
The children of a nobler stem,
Here lie within their narrow place,
And tears and blessings followed them.

VIII

The priest that from the sacred shrine
Oft raised the Sacrament on high,
And faithful spake the words divine,
And blessed the kneeling company.

IX

The minister of later days,
When larger streams of knowledge ran,
And he who ruled a little space,
The stern and steadfast Puritan—

X

Here lie they with the flock they fed,
Here lie they by the path they trod,—
Their memories for ever fled,
Their merits in the breast of God.

XI

Nameless they are, yet not unknown ;
 They toiled we know not how or when,
 Yet the good seed that they have sown
 Still lives within the hearts of men.

XII

So musing of the ancient dead,
 I watch the wintry sun decline,
 And wonder, as the graves I tread,
 What spot of churchyard earth is mine—

XIII

What soil shall on these limbs be cast,
 When shall they bear me solemnly ;—
 Now, or when lingering years have past ;
 Here, or beneath some other sky ?

XIV

What shall be said of praise or blame
 Above me when I lie alone ;
 What eyes shall read the graven name,
 Will some one weep upon the stone ?

XV

I know not ; but howe'er it be,
Wherever they shall lay my head,
May some kind spirit mourn for me,
And speak with patience of the dead !

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